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Ante-Bellum Southern Commercial Conventions

BY

WILLIAM WATSON DAVIS

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VII. ANTE-BELLUM SOUTHERN COMMERCIAL CONVENTIONS.

BY WILLIAM WATSON DAVIS, OAK GROVE, ALA.

In our national history, the Civil War is the most vital of past events. It was the culmination of a struggle lasting forty years. The compromise of 1820, the controversy about nullification, the compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska bill, the Dred Scott decision, the formation of sectional parties, burning eloquence and fierce invective mark the course of one phase of the struggle—the political. The maelstrom of the sixties ended it.

At the South, there was another phase of the struggle. It might be termed the economic. Its aim was not the control of territory, nor was its purpose political, but the making of the South economically independent of the North. Its opponent was not the Northern populace, but Southern industrial and commercial conditions.

The index of this movement is a number of commercial conventions, beginning in the latter part of the thirties and ending with the outbreak of the war. These conventions held very much the same relation to the body economic that the great political conventions of the day did to the body politic. A study of them—fourteen in all and extending over twenty-two years—shows in the main four things: first, the actual industrial, commercial, and financial condition of the South as illustrated by statistics; second, the general attitude toward the North at successive periods during the twenty odd years preceding the war of a large and prominent class of Southern men of affairs who were not distinctly politicians; third, the existence in the South then of national ideas even now considered far advanced; fourth, and probably most important, the rise and development of the movement for Southern commercial independence.

Before this movement can be followed, the South's economic condition at home and its commercial relations abroad must be generally understood.

From early times in the history of the English colonies in America, those south of Pennsylvania,—Virginia, the Carolinas, Maryland, and Georgia,—were the agricultural section, and up to 1770 led in aggregate commerce, according to the census of 1850. The imports of the two sections—the northern colonies and the southern—were about the same with some difference in favor of the North. The exports, however, were greatly in favor of the southern colonies. The following table shows the condition during the colonial period.¹

Year.	NORTHERN COLONIES.		SOUTHERN COLONIES.		AGGREGATE.	
	New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.		Maryland, Virginia, Carolinas, and Georgia.		North.	South.
	<i>Exports.</i>	<i>Imports.</i>	<i>Exports.</i>	<i>Imports.</i>		
1700	\$318,000	\$795,000	\$1,656,000	\$922,000	\$1,297,000	\$2,578,000
1710	203,000	737,000	1,045,000	736,000	1,040,000	1,781,000
1720	369,000	953,000	1,971,000	644,000	1,322,000	2,615,000
1730	369,500	1,605,000	2,492,000	1,077,000	1,974,000	3,569,000
1740	544,000	1,733,000	3,037,000	2,306,000	2,277,000	3,433,000
1750	561,000	4,160,000	3,512,000	2,427,000	4,721,000	5,939,000
1760	408,000	8,938,000	3,379,000	4,120,000	9,346,000	7,517,000
1770	1,230,000	5,026,000	3,847,000	4,601,000	6,256,000	8,448,000

After the Revolution, when the colonies had become States, commerce, both exports and imports, steadily shifted in favor of the North. The fields of the South rapidly spread and with proportional rapidity did the merchant fleets of the Northern States increase.² Both the climate and the soil of the South favored the raising of staple crops, and so did her system of labor. The less fertile soil of the North with its more rigorous climate prevented the culture of great staple crops. Accordingly, from perfectly natural causes, the South continued agricultural and the North, manufacturing and commercial.³

Commerce and manufactures exert a centralizing influence. They develop cities, centers of trade. Agriculture exerts a decentralizing influence. It tends to scatter population. Thus, at

¹ *Compendium of the U. S. Census, 1850, p. 184.*

² *Compendium of the U. S. Census, 1850, p. 186.*

³ "Progress of American Commerce," in De Bow's *Review*, December, 1846.

the North we find the rise of such cities as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.⁴ They were but the exponents of the economic life of their section. At the South, as the fields of cotton and corn expanded, the Southern cities languished. The levying of a tariff increased the industrial ascendancy of the North and hampered the development of the South.⁵ Under its protecting influence manufactures increased and flourished and nourished the emporiums of trade and finance,—New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. The great market for the agricultural products of the South was Europe—England especially. To this market the planters shipped their cotton through Northern brokers and largely in Northern ships. That which did not cross the ocean went to the manufactories of the Northern States. When these ships which carried abroad the results of Southern agriculture returned to America they were freighted with foreign articles of merchandise.⁶ It was but the natural law of exchange in trade. On return, where would this foreign merchandise be landed? Would the importers seek the small town in the midst of a scattered and rural population, or great cities in the midst of a much denser population? Again by the natural laws of trade, imports into the United States sought Northern ports. At these ports operated the numerous middle men and accessories incident to an extended foreign trade,—namely, the importer, the jobber, the insurance man, the banker, and the shipper. Through these ports came to the South the return trade from Southern products sent abroad. Here yearly the Southern merchant went, bought his stock on credit (generally) and reshipped it South. The Northern importer advanced to the Southern merchant just as to-day the city merchant in the South advances to the planter. The profits of handling the bulk of the material wealth of the South and the return trade which it brought accrued to the North. Shippers' charges, importers' profits, insurance, municipal taxes on imported merchandise, similar State taxes, wharfage, and charges

⁴ "Growth of New York," by Kettell, in *De Bow's Review*, January, 1848.

⁵ "Progress of American Commerce," in *De Bow's Review*, December, 1846.

⁶ "Reports to Charleston Convention of 1839," by George McDuffie, Robt. Y. Hayne, and F. Elmore, in *The Industrial Resources of the South and West*, vol. iii, pp. 92-116.

for re-shipment went to Northern men.⁷ The banks of this section financed the trade. The South produced while the North manipulated her productions. Each year the North was getting firmer control of Southern resources, when in the latter part of the thirties the movement for Southern commercial independence began.

This then was the economic situation which a large number of Southern men wished to correct. Their intentions at last crystallized into a commercial convention that met at Augusta, Ga., in the fall of 1837.⁸ It was the first of fourteen conventions extending down to 1859. Judged by the resolutions passed and the general tone of the proceedings, three of these meetings cannot be counted in the number of those whose avowed aim was Southern commercial and industrial independence. The conventions alluded to met in 1845, 1849, and 1852.⁹ Yet a study of their objects plainly shows that if they were carried out, the South would certainly be the greatest gainer, and in a way too that would tend toward economic independence of the North. Also, these conventions, though each separated from the other by several years, form a connecting link between the compact groups of 1837-1839 and 1853-1859. They unquestionably stand for the trend of Southern economic thought during this gap of fourteen years. While they were not meetings expressly for Southern supremacy, they can hardly be logically omitted in an account of that movement.

We have then, three disconnected series of conventions,—those of 1837-1839, four in number; those of 1845-52, three in number; those of 1853-59, seven in number. The first and third series were strictly Southern commercial independence conventions, each meeting being an adjournment of the one preceding. The second series was made up of disconnected meetings, and stands for the great manifestations of the South's part in the mighty movement for railroads and internal development.

To what primal cause, or causes, must we look for the origin of these conventions? No definite answer is apparent. All

⁷ Address of the Augusta convention (1838) to the people of the South, in De Bow's *Review*, November, 1852, p. 477.

⁸ *Georgia Messenger*, Macon, October, 26, 1837.

⁹ Reports of the proceedings of these will be found in De Bow's *Review*.

things indicate that they were simply a natural outgrowth of the economic conditions of that time.

As the conventions aimed at eradicating the financial and commercial disparity between the North and the South, and as evidence indicates that a knowledge of this condition of affairs was possessed by Southern men some years before the first meeting was called, the birth of the idea of commercial independence no doubt occurred when the disparity first began to make itself felt. In the year 1816 was first levied a tariff definitely for the protection of manufactures. These the War of 1812 had forced into existence, almost exclusively in the North. The levying of this tariff marks the formal beginning of a system which favored manufactures, and which was disadvantageous to extended agriculture, and hence to the South.¹⁰ As the North surged forward and the South dropped behind, the situation grew clearer to Southern men, and the necessity for some action was obvious. In the latter half of the thirties—1835-1840—came the formal advent of the movement. In 1835 there is a brief notice of a convention of merchants at Knoxville, in which was discussed the commercial condition of the South.¹¹ About the same time appear notices of other meetings of a local character. The idea of Southern commercial independence had crystallized far enough by 1836 to form points of consultation here and there throughout the South. The following year, on October 16, 1837, a number of these points or groups came together in the first Southern commercial convention.

Six months previous had come the financial crisis of 1837. The banking system of the country was thrown into confusion and shaken to its very foundation. This appears to have been the occasion for the meeting. Wrote John C. Calhoun on Sept. 7, five weeks before the convention opened:¹²

"Van Buren has been forced by his situation and his terror of Jackson to play directly into our hands and I am determined that he shall not escape from us. We have now a fair opportunity to

¹⁰ Reports of McDuffie, Hayne and Elmore to the convention of 1839.

¹¹ *Georgia Messenger*, 1836 and 1837.

¹² Letter of John C. Calhoun to James E. Calhoun, Sept. 7, 1837, in the "Correspondence of John C. Calhoun," Dr. J. F. Jameson, editor, in *Report of the American Historical Association*, 1899, vol. ii.

break the last of our commercial shackles. I mean the control which the North through the use of Government credit acting through the banks has exercised over our industry and commerce. How wonderful that the author of the Safety Fund System and the favorite of New York (the state above all others the most benefited by the union of bank and state) should be forced by circumstances, which he could not control, to give the fatal death blow to his own offspring and supporters!—In the meantime, it is of vast importance that the meeting in Augusta should be fully attended. Now is the time. Abbeville must send her delegates. You and McDuffie ought to be two of them. Let a meeting be called at the Court House and the nominations be made.”

In the resolutions of the convention of the year following occurs this clause, which evidently refers to the panic of 1837 as the creator of favorable conditions for united Southern action, and logically an occasion for the first meeting:¹³

“That the present condition of the commercial relations of this country and the disruption of the existing channels of trade afford an opportunity of breaking down the trammels which have so long fettered our commerce and of restoring the South to its natural advantages.”

The Augusta convention opened on Oct. 18, 1837.¹⁴ Two States were represented: South Carolina by thirteen delegates, and Georgia by sixty-five. The Hon. Kerr Boyce, of Charleston, was chosen president. Compared with the great meetings which come after, with a dozen States represented by several hundred delegates, this convention was not a large affair. Yet it is of signal importance. It was the beginning of an all-Southern movement, of which the Civil War was the end. The resolutions passed were as follows:

1. “That in the opinion of this convention the present conjuncture of our commercial affairs is eminently propitious for the establishment of a system of direct importations through our southern and southwestern cities, and that we are called upon by every consideration of interest and of patriotism to throw off the degrading shackles of our commercial dependence.

2. “That with a view to induce public spirited capitalists to

¹³ *Georgia Messenger*, Apr. 12, 1838.

¹⁴ *Georgia Messenger*, Oct. 26, 1837.

embark in this business, the people of the staple growing states be recommended to give public manifestations of their determination to encourage and sustain importations through their own seaports.

3. "That two committees be appointed by the President of this Convention to memorialize respectively the Legislatures of Georgia and South Carolina on the subject of limited co-partnerships.

4. "That it is the sacred duty which the citizens of the Southern and Southwestern States owe to themselves, their posterity, and their country to give a decided preference when the terms are equal, in securing their supplies, to our merchants who carry on a direct trade with foreign countries.

5. "That a committee be appointed to prepare an address to the people of the Southern and Southwestern States setting forth the advantages and practicability of carrying on a direct trade with foreign nations—exhibiting in detail the extent of their resources.

6. "That said committee in preparing such address, embody and conform to the views of the convention as expressed in the preamble and resolutions just adopted.

7. "That this Convention recommend to the citizens of the Southern and Southwestern states, to appoint delegates to meet in convention at Augusta on the first Monday of April next (1838) to continue the interest and objects of this Convention before the people."¹⁵

If this convention be taken as a true evidence of the progress in the ideas of Southern commercial independence, and if the resolutions passed by it be taken as a fair statement of the convention's opinion, then a consideration of these resolutions is important. They may be said to stand for the opinion of the commercial element at the South—the first milestone in the movement.

"The degrading shackles of our commercial dependence" is a significant expression in the first resolution as to how the economic relations of the North and South were then regarded. It seems safe to say, therefore, that the dependence of the South upon the North was at this time, 1837, realized by a considerable class of Southern men of affairs.

Five of the six resolutions passed dealt with the great object

¹⁵ *Georgia Messenger*, Oct. 26, 1837.

of the meeting, direct trade with Europe.¹⁶ In analyzing these resolutions we find that two leading measures are advanced: the increase in the capital invested in Southern shipping, and the showing of preference to Southern importers and merchants "when the terms are equal." To aid in bringing about the first, an increase in capital, effort was made to induce the legislatures of Georgia and South Carolina to make legal "limited co-partnerships." This meant to make those connected with any company liable only to the amount of the money which they had invested. This was done to induce the conservative Southern capitalist to invest a portion of his surplus in shipping. The establishment of Southern direct trade would be an innovation which would be forced to fight its way to a safe basis. Many failures in the first attempts would be probable. Consequently, the Southern capitalist feared to back the undertaking because—to use a slang term—"he could not see the bottom." Now a limited co-partnership would put the bottom in sight. This measure was the only specifically practical thing done or advocated by the convention, except the calling of another convention to meet in Augusta on the first Monday of April, 1838.

At the appointed time, April 1, 1838, the second Southern commercial convention opened.¹⁷ Six States—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia—were represented. Thomas Butler King, of Georgia, was chosen president. Robert Y. Hayne, of South Carolina, was chairman of the Business Committee of Twenty-one.

In every way this was a bigger, broader, and more well-rounded meeting than the one of the year previous. The area of representation comprised six instead of two States, and the resolutions passed embraced a much wider field. The first two put forth plainly the commercial situation of the South and give the reason for it. Because of this they are worthy of examination.

I. "That a direct trade is the natural channel or communication between nations which offer to each other the best market for their natural productions and that the interventions of a

¹⁶ See a series of publications and articles on Southern direct trade with Europe, edited by J. D. B. De Bow, in *De Bow's Review*, Oct., Nov. and Dec., 1847.

¹⁷ Proceedings, in *Georgia Messenger*, April 12, 1838.

third party must operate as a tax upon the exchanges between them.

2. "That the Southern and Southwestern states of this Union offer those staples with which are purchased nearly the whole foreign imports of this country, that they are the consumers of a large portion of these imports, and ought naturally themselves to furnish the channel through which the exchange is made; that on no occasion have their citizens been found incapable of maintaining themselves in fair competition with other sections; and that the diversion of the trade from its natural channels must have been brought about by the unequal action of the Federal Government or by the abstraction of our people in other pursuits."¹⁸

In the third resolution appears the extract explanatory of the reason for the origin of the convention movement, already quoted. This is the only official utterance on the subject made by any of these conventions.

In the second of the resolutions, just quoted in full, is seen the alleged reason for the dependence of the South—"the unequal action of the Federal government or the abstraction of our people toward other pursuits."

So much for the general sentiments of the meeting. Of more importance were the specific measures proposed. These fall under five heads:

1. Those dealing with the financial facilities in the South.
2. Those dealing with the increase of capital in Southern commerce.
3. Those dealing with establishing at Southern seaports agencies for manufactures, foreign and domestic.
4. Those dealing with the better organization of the movement for Southern commercial independence.
5. Those dealing with the building of railroads in the South.

As regards the resolutions relative to financial facilities, the great end and object in view was the establishment in the South of as serviceable and as extended a system of banking as that in the North. This was to be accomplished by the following measures. Southern banks should devote a portion of their capital to the purchase of foreign exchange and to the procurement of credit

¹⁸ *Georgia Messenger*, April 12, 1838.

and funds in Europe. The use of this credit should be furnished to the importing merchant upon a discount or collateral pledge of such good paper as he might take from the merchant of the interior, and this accommodation should be afforded as well upon paper having more than six months to run as upon that having less. The banks of the interior and the seacoast should co-operate with each other in carrying on business, should receive bills of each other in general business, and should adopt such arrangements for settlements, at short periods, as might seem suitable. The resolutions went into detail as to just how this business could be best regulated. Taken as a whole and in a general sense the entire question of banking reform meant three things: the forming of connections abroad, the organization of facilities at home, and the identification of the Southern merchant with banking houses and the up-to-date credit system.¹⁹

It would be impossible to bring about a change of Southern commercial methods without capital. Therefore, an earnest appeal was made to Southern capitalists, most of whom were planters, for the investment of money in Southern commerce under the protection of laws of limited co-partnerships, "lately passed"²⁰ by the States of Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, and Virginia. The main endeavor of the convention of the year before had not only been realized in Georgia and South Carolina, but in four other Southern States. This passing of limited co-partnership laws in so many States at almost the same time is evidence that the legislatures of the South were in sympathy with the movement.

A very practical, and in a sense modern, idea was set forth by this convention. It was the proposal to establish agencies for foreign and domestic manufactures in the different Southern centers of trade. This is a fixture in the modern industrial world. It would have meant much for the South if it had been established, which evidence seems to indicate was not the case.

The fourth point mentioned embraced a considerable part of the convention's action. Three ways were urged for the better organization of the movement. They recall accounts of the

¹⁹ Synopsis made from resolutions printed in *Georgia Messenger*, April 12, 1838.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

struggle of the Colonies, Northern and Southern, against the common foe, England. The first way was an address to the people of the South and West, stating the object to be attained and asking co-operation. The second called for another convention to meet in Augusta on the third Monday of October, 1838, and provided for the appointment of a "Committee of Correspondence," whose duty it should be—"to take the proper measures to enlist the feelings of the people and secure a cordial co-operation on the part of the States interested in the object of this convention." The third recommendation to the members of the convention to assemble the citizens of their county or district and place before them the proceedings of the convention urging the vital expediency of carrying out its objects, "particularly by forming limited co-partnerships."²¹

The meeting adjourned after a highly successful session, and at the appointed time, Oct. 15, 1838, opened again at Augusta, Georgia.²² One hundred and forty delegates were there from six States,—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Virginia and North Carolina, represented in the previous convention, were not here. The presence of two new States showed that the movement was spreading and that the seaport States were not the only ones interested.

Col. James Gadsden, of Florida, was chosen president. Many well known Southern men were present, among whom were Col. A. J. Pickett, of Alabama; Messrs. George McDuffie and Robert Y. Hayne, of South Carolina.

The resolutions passed were repetitions of those passed by the spring convention, with the exception of two. Those dealing with specific matters were much more general in tone. In fact, the whole set of resolutions possessed this quality. The following are the topics treated in the seven passed:

1. The formation of trading associations by the members of the convention.
2. The connection of the Middle West with the Southern seaboard by canal and railroad.
3. Harmony and co-operation in all works of internal improvement.

²¹ *Georgia Messenger*, April 12, 1838.

²² Proceedings of the convention, in *Georgia Messenger*, October, 1838.

4. The extending of every legitimate aid by Southern banks to the incipient works of internal improvement.

5. The recommending to Southern legislatures of an inquiry concerning the amount of banking capital in the South.

6. The formation of direct connection by Southern banks with like European institutions.

7. The adjournment of the convention to meet in Charleston, S. C., on the third Monday of April, 1839.

It is seen that practically the only things new are the calls for harmony in internal improvement, and for legislative investigation of the amount of banking capital in the South. The first is nothing but a plea with a practical object in view. The present-day co-operation and "community of interest" policy of our railroads is somewhat an attainment of that object through natural processes of economic development.

As regards legislative investigation of Southern banking capital, which called on the legislature to find means of supplying the deficit if necessary, it is difficult to say just how practical it was. It certainly has the appearance of an artificial means for inducing commercial prosperity. How could the legislatures supply lacking capital except by the indirect method of passing laws favoring Southern trade and finance, and what laws in the end would be really favorable?

All measures but one advocated by the convention passed with little debate. That one was the fourth resolution dealing with the extension of aid by Southern banks to works of internal improvement. The resolution first read "to invest surplus capital in railroad companies," but after a lengthy and warm debate was changed to "works of internal improvement." The conservative element of the convention did not wish it to commit itself definitely to any one feature of internal improvement or commercial enterprise. "Railroads" then was a much more restricted term than now.

Through the entire proceedings of this third Augusta convention was exhibited a spirit of disinterestedness which paved the way for the great meeting of the following year at Charleston. Here on the 15th of April, 1839, assembled two hundred and nineteen delegates from six Southern States,—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. The eyes of

the South were on the convention. Reports of its proceedings appeared in the leading Southern papers. In less than two years' time the movement beginning at Augusta had grown to pretentious proportions. Asbury Hull, of Georgia, was president.²³

The scope of action here was broader than in the preceding conventions. The chief thing striven for by the meeting was direct trade with Europe. It proposed a less artificial series of measures than had heretofore been the case. It called on Southern capitalists to invest more liberally in Southern commerce; upon Southern planters to put part of their surplus not in new land and slaves but in commerce from Southern ports; upon Southern banks to loan all aid compatible with "safety" to those engaged in commerce, and to extend their credit; upon Southern leaders in finance and trade to invite foreign capital by special agents sent abroad; upon Southern merchants to co-operate with European merchants in establishing regular lines between the South and Europe; upon Southern legislatures and people for extended internal improvement to aid direct trade; upon the South generally to make provision for the commercial education of its youth; upon the literary spirit of the South to support a "Southern Review;" upon Southern legislatures and cities to exempt imported goods from tax till sold; upon Southern legislatures to exempt commercial capital from all tax except on interest and profits.²⁴

To carry out the measures of the convention, a committee of five citizens in each State represented was appointed.

On the 17th of April, after a three days session, the meeting adjourned *sine die*, and for six years the ideas it gave forth regarding the economic needs of the South and the measures advocated were allowed to germinate without the aid of a Southern commercial convention. Therefore, with its close, the first period of the movement for Southern commercial independence ends.²⁵

²³ Proceedings in *Alabama Journal*, Montgomery, April 24, 1839.

²⁴ A synopsis of resolutions passed, made from resolutions printed in *Alabama Journal*, April 24, 1839.

²⁵ So far, no definite reason has been found for this discontinuance of the movement. Says a writer in De Bow's *Industrial Resources of the South and West*, in alluding to these conventions:

....."We turned over their pages with great interest and mar-

The resolutions of the Charleston convention sought to promote direct trade in three ways: first, by lessening the cost of getting the agricultural products of the South to the seaboard; secondly, by increasing the amount of capital invested in Southern commerce in order to provide adequate shipping facilities for the actual carriage of Southern produce abroad, and also to create ample financial facilities at Southern ports for handling the trade; thirdly by decreasing the cost of importing.

These were certainly business propositions. They aimed at the restoration of Southern trade by the only method possible under normal conditions, that is, by making the cost of direct importing and exporting at the South less than at the North. How far they were carried into effect is not known. Statistics certainly show no increase in Southern shipping during the several years immediately following this convention. These figures show the combined imports and exports.²⁶

	<i>North.</i>	<i>South.</i>
1840,	\$136,692,000	\$93,483,000
1841,	156,155,000	86,854,000
1842,	122,405,000	73,687,000
1843,	70,854,000	57,508,000
1844,	137,987,000	74,084,000

It is doubtful if any mere set of financial measures could have brought the desired result. A realization of the convention's objects meant the partial revolutionizing of the South's economic life. It meant for an agricultural people with a peculiar social institution to become in large part commercial. It was too great a task for any mere series of meetings to accomplish alone. Such changes could only come from natural causes by the slow process of time. The aim of the methods proposed by the Charleston convention was based on natural laws of trade but the method of bringing this about was artificial rather than natural. It appealed to the people and did not force them.

Six years after the Charleston convention, a certain Captain

velled that a movement begun in such a spirit and prosecuted for a time with so much vigor, could have at last been suffered to die away, and pass, as it were, from the memory."

²⁶*Compendium* of U. S. Census, 1850, p. 186.

Bingham arrived in Memphis to advocate the building of a plank road to the Indian frontier. A committee of citizens of Memphis met to discuss the question. One of the committee, a Dr. Shanks, suggested a convention for July, which met. From the haste in which it was gotten up, it proved a very small affair. After, therefore, calling a convention to meet in November of the same year, it adjourned.²⁷

At the appointed time the great Memphis convention of 1845 opened. Five hundred and twenty-nine delegates assembled from twelve different States and one Territory: Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa (Ter.), Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. Over this assemblage, John C. Calhoun was chosen to preside. Here we find Northern men and Southern men coming together in common council to discuss the interests of the two sections, the West and the South. Nearer than any other Southern convention which preceded or followed did this one approach being national in character.²⁸

The theme exclusively was internal improvement, especially relative to transportation facilities.²⁹ It sought to bring the West in closer touch with the South, and to bring the different ports of the South in closer touch with one another. All measures passed dealt with improvement at home and in no instance avowedly stood for competition with the Eastern States. The convention at Charleston six years before advocated battling with the East for commercial supremacy; the convention at Memphis, the expenditure of national funds for the internal development of the South and West. Yet the ultimate object of each was the control of the market for Southern and Western agricultural produce. Mr. Calhoun in his opening address touched on this point.

"The South and Southwest were to him deeply interesting portions of the Union and whatever would tend to elevate them would meet with his hearty co-operation. These were the great agricultural divisions, whether terminating on the South Atlantic, on the the extended Gulf, or running backward of the

²⁷ De Bow's *Review*, January, 1846.

²⁸ Proceedings of convention, in De Bow's *Review*, January, 1846; also De Bow's *Review* for September, 1846, p. 84, and for September, 1847, p. 122.

²⁹ Resolutions, De Bow's *Review*, June, 1846, p. 18.

Allegheny Mountains and reaching to the Lakes. In these sections, the two things next to production, were the distribution of their wealth in the proper markets and a command of those markets."⁸⁰

The action taken by this convention was contained in seventeen resolutions. The subjects dealt with fall under eight heads: The improvement of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers; the connecting by canal of the upper Mississippi and lakes; the building of a railroad from the Mississippi valley to the South Atlantic ports; the improvement of the mail service in the South and West; the improvement by the national government of the South Atlantic, Gulf and Lake ports; the establishment in the South and West of national works and institutions (shipyards, dry-docks, armories, foundries and marine hospitals); the building of levees along the Mississippi river by national appropriations; and the construction of a military road through Arkansas to the Indian frontier.

A committee of five was appointed to memorialize Congress on the resolutions passed, and a similar committee to prepare an address to the people of the South and West.

A salient characteristic of those resolutions is that every one called on the national government to do or to pay for the work, entirely or in part. Thus in regard to the building of a Pacific railroad, they said:

"Resolved, that as many of the works pass through the public domain, this convention would respectfully urge upon the consideration of Congress the equity of granting the right of way and alternate sections in aid of the work so situated—such grant, in the opinion of this convention being no more than a fair compensation paid by the proprietor for the enhanced value imparted to the sections of the land retained by the government."⁸¹

In regard to the improvement of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers:

"Resolved, that the improvement and preservation of the navigation of those great rivers are objects as strictly national as any other preparation for the defense of the country, and that such

⁸⁰ Report of Mr. Calhoun's speech, in *De Bow's Review*, June, 1846, p. 14.

⁸¹ Resolutions, in *De Bow's Review*, June, 1846, p. 18.

improvement is deemed by this convention impracticable by the states, or individual enterprise and call for the appropriation of money for same by general government."³²

The position taken by Mr. Calhoun on this resolution and his constitutional interpretation in advocacy of it constitute the most noteworthy feature of the convention. Mr. Calhoun heretofore had stood prominently in the ranks of those opposed to internal improvements by the general government. Naturally when he accepted the presidency of an internal improvement convention, the eyes of the country turned more closely on him. To the surprise of friend and foe alike, he strongly advocated certain measures of internal improvement by the general government.³³ He declared the Mississippi to be in reality an inland sea; that the constitutional power which the general government possessed providing for the national defense and the regulation of commerce between the States, clearly gave it the power and required it to make safe and practicable the navigation of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers; that

"It was the genius of our government, and what was to him a beautiful feature, what individual enterprise could effect alone was left for individual enterprise; what a state and individuals could achieve together, was left to state and individuals; but what neither of these separately or conjointly were able to accomplish, that and that only was the province of the Federal government. He thought this was the case in reference to the Mississippi river. There was an indirect aid however which might be furnished by the Federal government to internal improvement schemes; as a land proprietor (a position which he hoped it would not long occupy) the Government in consideration of the improved value of its public domain might grant alternate sections of unoccupied land to the roads, etc., proposing to pass through it. * * * * In regard to the various railroad schemes in contemplation, he considered that which sought to connect the Southern seaboard with the Mississippi valley as most important in every particular. Commercially, it threw open markets

³² *Ibid.*, June, 1846, p. 18.

³³ "The effect was electrical. In many places it was stated that Mr. Calhoun had struck his flag and gone over to the side of internal improvement—though he disclaimed anything of the kind. In South Carolina so intense was the feeling and so evident the fear of defection, that though reelected by the legislature then in session, to the senate Mr. Calhoun's course was much and strongly animadverted upon."—*De Bow's Review*, September, 1846, p. 83.

to Western produce, at all times and seasons, and furnished two outlets, where but one had existed before. The mouth of the Mississippi might be blocked and the Gulf swept by foreign cruisers and the vast produce of the valley would not be left to perish but could seek its eastward passage in safety to Atlantic ports—and when the canal of which he was much in favor, was constructed, its way to the lakes would be equally open for a large portion of the year.”⁸⁴

The convention of 1845 in spite of its large number of delegates and cosmopolitan character as regards locality of representation; in spite of the able views put forth and sustained by the great Southern leader and the efficient executive methods employed by the convention to carry out its resolutions; in spite of the entire good will and seeming absence of friction between members, Northern and Southern, and the carefully balanced measures passed, attempting to distribute fairly all benefits to be derived from the course of action it advocated; in spite of these and even other good features, it must be considered more a failure than a success.

New Orleans and Southern Louisiana were fatally offended by the Atlantic-Mississippi valley scheme. It was claimed that this was an attempt to divert their trade with the interior into other channels. As late as 1855 this rankled in the breast of New Orleans merchants and did not fail to find expression.⁸⁵

The West also seems to have been alienated. The year following the Memphis convention, a similar but much larger meeting took place in Chicago.⁸⁶ Its delegates came from all the New England, Middle, and Western States, as well as from three Southern States. The aim of this meeting was internal improvement, but it based it on a much broader interpretation of the constitution than did Mr. Calhoun. Mr. Webster was the champion of this view and in a letter to the convention discussed the question at some length.⁸⁷ The result of the Chicago convention was

⁸⁴ Report of Mr. Calhoun's speech on his accepting the presidency of the convention, in *De Bow's Review*, January, 1846, p. 13.

⁸⁵ Speech of Judge Walken of New Orleans at convention of 1855—*De Bow's Review*, May, 1855; also New Orleans papers for that date.

⁸⁶ Report of proceedings at Chicago convention, in *De Bow's Review*, September, 1847, p. 123.

⁸⁷ *De Bow's Review*, September, 1847, p. 123.

to bring into closer commercial touch the East and the West. Says a leading journal of the time:

"The Memphis convention sought to conciliate all parties, and agree on some practical plan of action—a compromise if necessary—which could meet the general approval and hearty co-operation of all sections as the very best which under the circumstances could be secured. The Chicago, on the contrary, denounced this as impracticable and injurious and in no respect adequate to meet the requisition and necessities of the Northwest and Lakes. It comes out boldly, cuts the Gordian knot, and declares *openly for a system of internal improvement upon western lakes and rivers, co-extensive with all the requirements of their rapidly increasing commerce.*"³⁸

Thus it is seen, that the action of the Memphis convention tended to alienate the West and strengthen its union with the East, as well as to create dissension at home. Its memorial to Congress was turned down and nothing material came of its resolutions. All in all, what it actually accomplished was insignificant, but what it showed was of importance. The South was not united. Western sentiments and Eastern sentiments were nearer coinciding than Western and Southern.

Four years later, November 1849, there met in this same city of Memphis another commercial convention, the second of the 1845-1852 group. It met at the call of the citizens of Memphis. Its official designation was "The national convention."³⁹ The name was indicative of its scope of action, yet its real purpose was sectional—the advancement of the South and West.

Like the convention of 1845, this one was isolated. It neither adjourned into another nor was itself the adjourned meeting of a previous one. However, similarity of subjects treated connect it with the conventions following.

Here was first discussed in a Southern commercial convention a proposition which became a leading topic of the next group. This was the building of a Pacific railroad.⁴⁰ The times were

³⁸ De Bow's *Review*, September, 1847, p. 123.

³⁹ Proceedings and Resolutions, in De Bow's *Review*, November, 1849.

⁴⁰ Two generally informing articles on the subject are: "Inter-communication between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans," by A. Whitney, in De Bow's *Review*, October, 1847; and "Inter-communication between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans," by J. D. B. De Bow, in De Bow's *Review*, July, 1849.

propitious. California was ours. Gold had been discovered. Emigrants were rapidly filling the country. Its ports invited the trade of the Orient. North and South meetings were held to formulate plans for a road to the Pacific. The Memphis convention was but a part of a general movement to bring the Pacific coast in closer touch with the rest of the Union.

It proposed that this should be done in three ways: First, by a Pacific railroad; secondly, by transportation facilities, either canal or railroad, across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec; thirdly, by a military road along the Mexican frontier. Advocacy of these three measures constituted the real action of this convention. In a consideration of them two questions arise uppermost:

Were they practicable?

What effect would they have on the South?

As to the latter, it would tend to turn the trade of the Orient through the South. Former attempts at commercial supremacy aimed at wresting from the Northeast the control of European markets. This convention was not an avowed attempt at Southern commercial supremacy. The attainment of its objects meant the opening of a new and much greater market, the East, and the reins of power in the hands of the South at the start.

As to the former question, their practicability, the address of the convention to the people ably and conservatively discussed this.⁴¹ A consideration of the Pacific road constituted the body of the address.

It is estimated that the construction of such a road meant that the European-Orient route would be shortened from 20,000 miles to 10,000, and the time for a passage, from 130 days to 35. Under such conditions, the \$300,000,000 of Eastern trade could be carried in \$30,000,000 worth of bottoms instead of \$60,000,000. Estimating at 5 per cent. upon the value of ships discharged and time gained, a bonus of \$5,000,000 would be given the world's commerce by the building of this Pacific road.

The question of freight and passengers was next taken up. At that time, the average freight rate in the United States was three cents per ton per mile. Twenty years before, it was six cents. If the rate continued to fall in equal proportion, within fifteen or

⁴¹ Address, in *De Bow's Review*, March, 1850.

twenty years—about the time the Pacific railroad would be in operation, it would be one and one-half cents per ton per mile. With such a rate, this cross-continent route to the Orient could favorably compete in transportation charges with the ocean route to Europe. Says the address in conclusion:

"These facts and suggestions are presented for what they are worth. If freight and merchandise can be transported over the route at anything like the cost indicated by us, then the problem of Eastern trade is far less difficult of solution than might have been imagined. These costs can be demonstrated to be, all things considered, about the same as are at present incurred, including of course the freight from either terminus to Asia or to Europe. If on the contrary, the present average of freight must always be maintained, then the case against the railroad, so far as Europe is concerned, is too strong perhaps to be resisted.

"In regard to passengers, a different ground may be taken. The saving in time for them will be from 20 to 30 days. These passengers now pay from \$600 to \$900. This route will not exceed \$250.

"A railroad is therefore presented to the people with a bonus, as previously explained of \$5,000,000 per annum in its favor, with such carriage of freight and passengers as it is bound to monopolize, through an immense and growing region, with the whole trade of the Pacific coasts and Atlantic at its command, with a considerable profit of mail carriage and government stores and with a large part of our rapidly growing trade with India, and as much of that of Europe as can by competition be induced. *

* * A final question remains to be decided: Is it within the reach of our enterprise? The highest amount which has yet been assumed for the road is \$100,000,000. * * * But this is putting the case in the worst possible light. * * * The sum of \$100,000,000, too, is based upon an estimate of 2,000 miles and an average cost of \$50,000 per mile; whereas, upon the shortest projected route the distance may not exceed 1,500 miles, reducing the sum to \$75,000,000. Fifty thousand dollars is double the average of roads and five times the minimum. The average would give upon the shortest line less than \$40,000,000. This is the most favorable view possible."⁴²

The route which the convention recommended, then known as the Southern route, extended from San Diego, Cal., through what is now New Mexico and Arizona to Paso del Norte, and from

⁴² De Bow's *Review*, March, 1850.

there across Texas to the Mississippi. The funds for the building of the road were to come from the sale of government lands.

The resolutions on the Isthmian route considered it only a temporary measure and recommended to the national government to foster the enterprise by granting contracts for the carriage of government mail and military stores to the private company already organized for better Isthmian communication.⁴³

The military road along the Mexican frontier meant simply the establishment of a chain of military posts. It was urged as a necessary preliminary to the construction of a railroad, and as a needed protection to the emigrant against the Indian.

The spirit of the Memphis convention of 1845 seemed to beget the one of 1849, and the spirit of the latter certainly had much to do with the origin of the railroad conventions at New Orleans during 1851-1852.⁴⁴ The great convention of 1852, although it adjourned *sine die*, seems from evidence so far gathered, the logical beginning of those conventions which occurred yearly thereafter till the outbreak of the Civil War.⁴⁵ A word as to its origin will therefore be not only of importance as regards this one meeting, but will be of use in explaining the beginning of the group which followed.

In the first place, the Memphis conventions of 1845 and 1849 roused the people of New Orleans and lower Louisiana to action. The connecting of the Mississippi valley with the Atlantic seaboard meant a probable deflection in the course of the enormous and ever growing trade of the Middle and Northwest. Self-preservation, the first law of nature, is a determining factor in trade.⁴⁶

The first public intimation of a general Southern convention

⁴³ See "The Tehuantepec Company," in De Bow's *Review*, August, 1853.

⁴⁴ "We hope yet to have such a convention in our city—Memphis and St. Louis having set the example.—De Bow's *Review*, June, 1851, p. 690; also De Bow's *Review*, December, 1851, p. 621.

⁴⁵ De Bow's *Review*, September, 1853, p. 254.

⁴⁶ "A great portion of the New Orleans trade had within the last five or six months gone off by way of Charleston and unless energy were displayed, the whole of the trade with the eastern and western valley of the Mississippi would go by that route."—Speech of Col. H. W. Walter at convention in New Orleans, 1851, in De Bow's *Review*, June, 1851. A discussion of the importance of the valley trade to New Orleans and other parts of the country is found in "Contests for the Trade of the Mississippi Valley," by Buckner H. Payne.—De Bow's *Review*, February, 1847.

was made in the early spring of 1851. A meeting of business men interested in the Memphis and New Orleans railroad was in progress in New Orleans. At this meeting Mr. J. D. B. De Bow of the city introduced a resolution which was unanimously adopted, calling for a general Southern and Southwestern convention in New Orleans at an early date, and recommended that the City Council take steps toward calling this meeting.⁴⁷ About the same time, a call went forth from the friends of the proposed New Orleans and Jackson railroad for a convention of those interested in the road to meet in New Orleans on the third Wednesday of April, 1851.⁴⁸ At the appointed time, April 16th, the convention met. Delegates from four States were present, but this meeting can hardly be considered a Southern commercial convention in the light in which we are viewing them. It met at the call of a private railroad company and all the proceedings dealt, not with Southern advancement generally but rather in guarding the New Orleans valley trade by a line of railroad paralleling the Mississippi.⁴⁹ At this convention Mr. De Bow introduced a resolution to the effect, that the convention resolve itself into a general Southern and Southwestern convention to meet in December next at New Orleans, but nothing came of the resolution.

Two months later, on June 4, another local railroad convention convened in New Orleans. Its purpose was to build a road from that city into the northwestern portion of the State. Its members were the wealthiest men of the section. The recent meetings of the Memphis and New Orleans and Jackson people most probably had an effect in bringing this about. Both the above lines would extend northeastwardly on the eastern side of the Mississippi. This meeting⁵⁰ was purely local in character and of no especial importance, except that it called the Southern railroad convention of January 5, 1852.

Eleven States were here represented—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia—and three hundred and seventy-four delegates were present, of whom three hundred and twenty

⁴⁷ De Bow's *Review*, April, 1851, p. 465.

⁴⁸ De Bow's *Review*, April, 1851, p. 465.

⁵⁰ Proceedings of convention, in De Bow's *Review*, August, 1851.

came from Louisiana. Ex-Governor Alex. Mouton, of Louisiana, was chosen president.⁵¹

This convention met to be, and ended by being, strictly a railroad convention. Other measures—the improvement of rivers and the building of canals—were proposed, but voted down because “they would injure the object of the convention.”⁵² The scope of action at the meeting was broadly Southern, with New Orleans naturally in the foreground. The object striven for was *Connected railroad development*.⁵³ Three lines were especially advocated. A railroad to the Pacific, the Southwestern National Railroad to Washington City, and the Tehuantepec Isthmian Railroad. The delegation of each State represented submitted to the convention an outline of such necessary railroad extension in that State, as would tend to make the railway systems of each State connect with those in others.

Now the convention suggested three sources from which the necessary aid to carry on railroad construction might be secured, namely, the nation, the state, and the community. By the first it meant that the general government grant sections of the public land to the railroad companies. The exact method of State aid was not specified. It simply called for the “application of the resources” of the State. The third method, by community, was the most specifically dealt with of the three. The resolutions embodying it proposed that all the States represented make it lawful for cities, towns, parishes, or counties to take stock in any legitimate railroad enterprise, if a majority of the voters wished to do so; that the resources for the payment of such subscriptions be levied on landed property; that the dividends be divided among the land-holders in proportion to land taxes paid; and that the administration of the stock remains in the hands of the local authorities.⁵⁴

The method of advocating these measures was an address to Congress and to the separate State legislatures. There was nothing new in the first two. As to the last, it seems a new idea

⁵¹ Proceedings of convention, in De Bow's *Review*, March, 1852.

⁵² Proceedings, in De Bow's *Review*, March, 1852, p. 317.

⁵³ See Resolutions passed, in De Bow's *Review*, March, 1852.

⁵⁴ See Resolutions.

for a Southern convention. Certainly it would have aided the railroads.

The convention adjourned *sine die*. No doubt, if in any way its influence could be traced, not a small part of the South's rapid progress in the building of railroads during the years following would be found to be due to it. In December of the same year (1852), at the call of the citizens of Baltimore,⁵⁵ the first of the last series of Southern commercial conventions met. Possibly the example set by the great New Orleans meeting bore fruit "after its kind," and this fruit was the Baltimore convention. Wm. C. Dawson, of Georgia, was chosen president. Twelve States and a district were represented—Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.⁵⁶

Although the action of the convention dealt with several questions of importance to the South—touching its two great needs, internal improvement and direct trade—it was too closely identified with the interests of the city of Baltimore to have full weight throughout the South and West. It was claimed that Baltimore used the convention for her own ends,—as a means of advertisement and of strengthening her commercial reputation.⁵⁷

The meeting's official action was included in nine resolutions. One extended thanks to the city for the courtesies shown the members of the convention, which left eight resolutions for the real measures. These include five spheres of action.

1. An increase of inter-communication between the cities and the States of the South, West and Southwest.
2. The improvement of harbors on the Atlantic coast.
3. The establishment of steamship lines between Baltimore and Europe and South America.
4. The necessity of the general government's fostering steamship communication between the South and the Amazon, and building up Southern shipping.

⁵⁵ De Bow's *Review*, October, 1852, p. 426.

⁵⁶ Proceedings of the convention, in De Bow's *Reviews*, April, 1853.

⁵⁷ De Bow's *Review*, March, 1855, p. 354.

5. The importance to the South and West of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad.⁵⁸

Every one of the resolutions, of which the above is a brief synopsis, exhibit pre-eminently one characteristic, generality of tone. They were little more than casual expressions of opinion. They tell what should be done, but offer no suggestions as to the method of procedure. The convention cannot be called one of action. Its resolutions could hardly have exerted great influence. Neither did they contain much that was new. However, here was first broached at a Southern meeting of this sort a question which became the leading theme of two conventions following,—the opening of trade relations between the South and the Amazon valley.

Judged in the light of what we know, the Baltimore convention does not rank among the more important Southern commercial conventions. Its measures lacked force and point—were weak. Yet it is of importance because it was the first convention of an important series, because it showed that Baltimore, and logically Maryland, stood prominently for Southern commercial advancement, and because it called that great convention at Memphis which met the next year. It was not the pioneer meeting of an entire movement, but of the last and most important phase of that movement.

After fifteen years of effort and often seeming failure, Southern commercial conventions had become established. They had passed the early, experimental stage. For seven consecutive years, 1852-1859, these meetings occurred regularly each year, in spite of the feverish political condition of the times and the section.

The remaining conventions are so intimately connected, so much alike in measures and methods of procedure, that a separate full discussion of each would mean much repetition. They can best be viewed as a composite whole, as regards their basic measures. This has reference of course only to the resolutions put forth and the discussions carried on. Each convention, like each day's proceedings, possessed certain fundamental characteristics, certain facts that belong only to it; and each, like every

⁵⁸ Synopsis of resolutions, made from those in De Bow's *Review*, September, 1853.

piece of music, had its theme. One measure, or a group, stood out more prominently than the others.

Therefore the history of this series, for clearness and brevity, will be divided into two parts: First, brief narratives of the several conventions; second, a consideration of their basic measures.

The Memphis convention of 1853 was an adjourned meeting of the Baltimore convention. It opened June 16th and continued in session till June 20th. Fourteen States were represented: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Four hundred and ninety-six delegates were present. Wm. C. Dawson, of Georgia, again presided.⁵⁹

The proceedings of this body were harmonious. The resolutions passed dealt with almost every economic need of the South except direct trade with Europe. The chief theme of the convention was the Amazon river—its free navigation and importance to the South.⁶⁰ Next in prominence to this question came the building of a Pacific railroad, which the convention claimed should be aided by the national government. Of almost equal prominence with this, were resolutions providing for the improvement of rivers and harbors and the settlement by the national government of the right of way for the Tehuantepec railroad across the isthmus.⁶¹ More liberal education in the South, the collecting of information regarding the manufacture of cotton in the South, special negotiations abroad respecting cotton and tobacco interests, and the establishment of a bureau of statistics, were other matters acted on.

The New York *Tribune* thus criticizes the meeting:

⁵⁹ Proceedings of the convention, in DeBow's *Review*, September, 1853.

⁶⁰ The following articles discuss the Amazon region and the situation at that time:

"Valley of the Amazon," by Lieut. M. F. Maury.—De Bow's *Review*, May, 1853.

"Region of the Amazon," by Lieut. Wm. Herndon.—De Bow's *Review*, March, 1854.

"Exploration of the Amazon," by Lieut. Gibbon.—De Bow's *Review*, March, 1855.

"Shall the Amazon and Mississippi Reciprocate Trade.—De Bow's *Review*, February, 1853.

⁶¹ See "Tehuantepec, a report made to the late Southern convention by Thos. H. Semmes," in De Bow's *Review*, February, 1857.

"Bishop Otey's talk on Amazonia was chaff. Light seems to be breaking at the South as regards protection. The significant resolution passed was that relating to manufactures. This is the right move for the South. Dependence on Liverpool, England, is the cause of the depression in the South. Direct trade is what the South wants, but she must get this direct trade by building up her home resources."⁶²

The next convention, which met in Charleston, April 10-15, 1854, was unquestionably the greatest of Southern commercial conventions. Eight hundred and fifty-seven delegates were present, representing thirteen States—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.⁶³ In the scope and character of resolutions passed, in the number of delegates present, in the general method of work, and in the enthusiasm shown, this meeting stood above all others, before or after.

Hon. Wm. C. Dawson, of Georgia, for a third time was chosen president.

The building of a Pacific railroad was the theme, the leading issue, of this convention. The resolutions passed advocated the building of such a road by the Southern States in corporation, without the aid of the national government. It departed therefore radically on this question from the views of the Memphis convention.

The encouragement of direct trade with Europe, the connection of Southern ports with the Amazon valley, the building of railways generally throughout the South, and the collecting of statistics regarding the suitability of the country for manufacturing, were also the subjects for resolutions. The proceedings of the meeting, though well-filled with debate, show no acrimonious or violent statements. The convention lacked the great constitutional discussions that took place at Memphis in 1845. It lacked the brilliant debate of those of 1857, 1858 and 1859. Its point of excellence lay in the broad and systematic nature of its work.

⁶² *New York Tribune*, February 15, 1853.

⁶³ *Journal of Proceedings, etc.*, (1854), 8 vo., pp. 159, xxiii.

"The convention did good both as a safety valve and extinguisher. No disunion plan was brought forth and the reopening of the slave trade was hardly noticed. The main objects of the convention were, steamers to Europe and home manufactures. These cannot amount to much without money and money cannot be obtained outside of Wall Street."⁶⁴

On January 9th of the next year, 1855, the New Orleans meeting opened.⁶⁵ It was in many ways a less important convention than that at Charleston. Through its entire proceedings can be detected here and there a spirit of discord. The press and the People of New Orleans seemed out of sympathy with the movement. In the remarks of a prominent New Orleans delegate to the convention are unrepressed sneers at the proceedings of previous conventions and the reasons for New Orleans's lack of interest.

"The conventions designed to circumvent the commission merchant of New Orleans; they designed to overthrow the principles of free trade established for centuries, to regulate the whole cotton business and to establish laws between trade and commerce. * * * The Mississippi river was treated as a mere horse pond. * * * Every planter who had a dozen negroes wanted a railroad running by his house and another by his kitchen. * * * They treated the existence of New Orleans as as fabulous as that of Tyre and Sidon. * * * If the city of New Orleans acted with a lukewarm spirit it was owing to hostilities of previous conventions towards her interests."⁶⁶

The number of delegates was less than one-fourth that at Charleston, being two hundred and twelve. Twelve States were represented—Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The only plausible explanation of the presence of a delegation from Pennsylvania was for the purpose of furthering action on the improvement of the Ohio. The convention chose Gen. Mirabeau B. Lamar, of Texas, president.

The all-absorbing question of the meeting was the building of

⁶⁴ *New York Times*, December 15, 1854.

⁶⁵ Proceedings, in *De Bow's Reviews*, March, April, May and June, 1855.

⁶⁶ Speech of Judge Alex. Walker, of New Orleans, at New Orleans convention (1855).—*De Bow's Review*, May, 1855, p. 625.

a Pacific railroad. The eloquent Col. Albert Pike, of Arkansas, was its champion—as he had been at Charleston the year before.⁸⁷ The convention endorsed the Charleston views but somewhat modified them in that it proposed that the national government should aid by the appropriation of public lands. Thus it is seen that the Memphis and Charleston measures for a Pacific road were combined to make the New Orleans' measures.

Other leading questions on which resolutions were passed were: Southern direct trade with Europe, the deepening of Southern harbors by the national government, and the abolition of duties on railroad iron. Two committees of three each were to carry out the objects of the convention. Another committee of seven was to choose the time and place for the next meeting.

Richmond, Virginia, was the place, and the time selected was January 30, to February 3, 1856. At that meeting two hundred and thirteen delegates assembled from seven States—Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia—and the District of Columbia. One hundred and eighty-three of these delegates came from Virginia. The president of the meeting was Gen. Tench Tilghman, of Maryland.⁸⁸

Direct trade with Europe was the chief topic of discussion and resolutions. The latter called for a reduction of the tariff on railroad iron and a release by Southern legislatures of all license tax on direct importations. Two years before, the *New York Tribune* in reviewing the movement for the revival of Southern commerce said:

"The South's opposition to a protective tariff is the cause for her dependence on the North. She has therefore made her bed and must lie in it. Mere abstract considerations cannot influence the course of trade."⁸⁹

The need of a line of steamships from Southern ports was also touched on in the resolutions.

This convention may be ranked among the less important. Early in the session the question of adjournment was proposed, that is, adjournment to meet later at Savannah.

⁸⁷ See Proceedings of convention.

⁸⁸ Proceedings, in De Bow's *Review*, March, 1856.

⁸⁹ *New York Tribune*, December 20, 1852.

At the specified time, December 8, 1856, the Savannah convention opened. It was in session six days, until December 14. Five hundred and sixty-four delegates were present from ten States—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. James Lyon, of Virginia, was president.⁷⁰

Here was exhibited much of the spirit of the Charleston convention of two years before. The delegation was large and the resolutions passed broad in the field which they covered and definite in the views which they advocated.

Direct trade with Europe and a Pacific railroad were the subjects of the more important resolutions. The former meant the endorsement of what was then known as the "Dudley Mann scheme," which was to establish between Norfolk and Milford Haven, England, a "weekly ferry line of iron steamships of 20,000 tons burden."⁷¹ The resolutions on the Pacific railroad reiterated the views of the New Orleans convention.⁷² Resolutions on the publishing of Southern manufacturing and mining statistics by the national and State governments, on the Tehuantepec railroad, on education, and on the necessity of counter emigration from the South into Kansas, constitute other points of importance acted on.

At this convention, a committee was appointed to look into the expediency of reopening the slave trade. A committee was also appointed to examine the question of free trade and direct taxation. During the proceedings a letter from Robert Toombs, of Georgia, was received in which he gave his views regarding direct trade and import duties—a most logical exposition—which will be discussed further on.⁷³

The convention's tone was quiet and its resolutions covered in sentiment many Southern needs. The *New York Times* evidently expected a different sort of meeting. It says:

"The South should not be judged by Southern conventions. The last convention was meant for a fire-eaters' convention, but

⁷⁰ Proceedings of the convention in *De Bow's Review*, January and March, 1857; also *Advertiser and State Gazette*, Montgomery, December 17, 1856.

⁷¹ Resolutions of Savannah convention of 1856, in *De Bow's Review*, January, 1857.

⁷² Resolutions of Savannah convention of 1856.

⁷³ Printed in *De Bow's Review*, January, 1857.

turned out otherwise. It is believed that the masses in the South are conservative, and if proper methods had been resorted to for election of delegates to the convention different results would have come to pass."⁷⁴

In the Savannah convention is found the first appearance of the political germ—the resolutions dealing with the trouble in Kansas and the revival of the slave trade.⁷⁵ The possible agitation of these questions was evidently what caused the *New York Times* to make the foregoing statement. These questions were too intimately connected with the politics of the hour to be touched by any assemblage without the scorch of political fire sooner or later. This came two years later in Montgomery when a commercial convention was metamorphosed into one political.

In point of attendance, the Knoxville convention, which met the next year on August 9, 1857, ranked next to the great Charleston convention. Seven hundred and ten delegates were present, representing eleven States and one territory—Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Arizona (territory). J. D. B. De Bow, of Louisiana, the well-known Southern economist, who at one time was head of the United States Census Department, was chosen president.⁷⁶

The convention passed no resolution relative to internal improvement. The chief topics of discussion were the revival of Southern commerce and the reopening of the African slave trade.⁷⁷ On the latter question no definite resolutions were passed other than one calling for an investigation of the matter. The resolutions on the revival of Southern commerce advocated the establishment of steamship lines from Southern ports and called for State aid. The improvement by the national government of Southern harbors, the fostering of a more advanced and widely spread and thoroughly Southern system of education, and

⁷⁴ *New York Times*, December 17, 1856.

⁷⁵ Resolutions of Savannah convention of 1856, in De Bow's *Review*, January, 1857, compared with resolutions of previous conventions.

⁷⁶ *Official Report*, etc., of Knoxville convention, W. Blair Lord, reporter, (1857), 8 vo., pp. 96.

⁷⁷ *Official Report*, etc.

the establishment of a great interstate printing house were the subjects for the other prominent resolutions.⁷⁸

A significant thing of the proceedings was the ample provision made for carrying out the objects of the convention. Six committees were appointed, instead of two or three, as was usually the case.

With the close of the Knoxville meeting, the strictly ante-bellum Southern commercial convention became a thing of the past. The two remaining ones—1858 and 1859—which logically belong to this same group, were as much political as economic in fact, more so. The whirlpool of political events at that time seemed to bring all things under its influence. Mighty political forces were at war, but under them, unheeded and unthought of by the multitude, much mightier economic forces were seeking adjustment.

The commercial convention of 1858 met in Montgomery, Ala., May 10th. Ten States were represented—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. A. P. Calhoun, of South Carolina, was chosen president.⁷⁹

This meeting dealt little if at all with purely economic topics. The leading theme of discussion was the question of reopening the African slave trade. In a theoretical sense, this could have been treated purely as an economic question; but to treat it in a definite, practical sense, the political question was of necessity bound to enter in. Only through political means could the laws of the Union be changed, or if the alternative was agreed on, separation from the Union would be a political issue.

That on which the debate hinged was a report in favor of reopening this trade, submitted to the convention by Mr. Spratt, of South Carolina, chairman of the committee which drafted it.⁸⁰ The report treats the subject from all standpoints and especially from the economic. In discussing the question, the convention, in the main, put aside the economic phase and treated it as a political issue, an issue on which hung the continuance of the South within the Union.

⁷⁸ Resolutions in *Official Report* of Knoxville convention.

⁷⁹ Proceedings of convention printed in *De Bow's Review*, June, 1858.

⁸⁰ This Report is printed in full in *De Bow's Review*, June, 1858.

Mr. Yancey, of Alabama, was the spokesman and leader of those favoring the reopening of the trade. He claimed that the law which prohibited it was unconstitutional; that the constitution says: "Congress shall enact no laws prohibiting the emigration and importation of such persons as the States now allow before the year 1808." This very clause, he said, was a guarantee of slavery because it forbade Congress to interfere with it before 1808. When in 1807 a law was passed that after 1808 no slaves should be imported into the Union, that law was unconstitutional in its discrimination against the South. As to the economic expediency, he was virtually silent on the subject, saying that the great law of supply and demand would regulate that.⁸¹

Mr. Yancey's most prominent opponent was Roger A. Pryor, of Virginia. His speeches to the convention consisted in large part of answers to the economic and kindred arguments in favor of it, quoted in Mr. Spratt's report. Mr. Pryor said that if the South wished to increase its population for political power it should induce foreign white emigration and not bring in at a great cost slaves who counted only three-fifths as much. He claimed that a dense population, as at the North, meant the failure of our republican form of government; that an increase and consequent cheapening of labor for the cotton fields would cause a decline in the price of cotton; that the enlargement of the basis of slavery would bring no advantage to the South or to the institution of slavery; and that its diffusion following an increase in the number of slaves by importation, would mean the actual weakening of the institution. He thought that as long as the South remained in the Union, a repeal of the law prohibiting the slave trade was impracticable and moreover unconstitutional. According to the actual remarks of Mr. Pinckney, of South Carolina, he and other members from the South in the constitutional convention understood the constitution to grant the power to Congress to prohibit the importation of African slaves after the year 1808. It was considered then a bargain struck, a contract made by the framers of the constitution.⁸²

Hon. Henry W. Hilliard also figured prominently in the debate, supporting Mr. Pryor. He claimed that the power of Congress

⁸¹ Proceedings of convention in *De Bow's Review*, June, 1858.

⁸² Proceedings of convention in *De Bow's Review*, June, 1858.

to regulate commerce gave it the right to pass laws against the African slave trade. He strengthened his statement by reading passages from Elliott's debates, showing that the framers of the constitution, Mr. Madison among them, were of his opinion.⁸³

Nothing was accomplished by the convention of 1858 except the agitation of one part of a question which in three years time led to secession and civil war.

The resolutions as finally passed were in brief, as follows:

1. That the convention is in favor of the establishment of Americans in Nicaragua.
2. That the Federal government is warned against any further unlawful debarring of Southerners from that region.
3. That it is inexpedient for any State or its citizens to attempt to reopen the African slave trade while that State be in the Union.
4. That the Federal government should repeal the fishing bounties.
5. That a convention be called to discuss the serious political dangers to the South.⁸⁴

Was this convention changed into one political after its assembling, or was its political tendency prearranged? Both, probably. In the publication of the convention objects before the meeting by the official committee appointed for that purpose at Knoxville the year before, these were the points put forth:

1. "The question of master and slave, involving the physical and religious improvement of the slave; the subject of slave laws and police; the reclamation of slave property taken away by fraud or force; and the modes of retaliatory legislation.
2. "The question of the supply of labor at the South, in its relation to the production and consumption of Southern commodities, to the free blacks, to the African fleet, and to the action of England and France in the introduction of coolies and apprentices.
3. "The effect of the tariff, banking bounty, and navigation system upon the South and the reciprocal interests to the planter and merchant.
4. "The development of Southern agriculture, a proper enlargement of manufactures and commerce, the establishment of a system of internal improvement, and the subject of ocean steamers and marts.

⁸³ Proceedings of convention in De Bow's *Review*, June, 1858.

⁸⁴ Synopsis made from resolutions in De Bow's *Review*, June, 1858.

5. "The resources and self-sustaining capabilities of the slave-holding States, and the establishment and independence of their literary and educational systems.

6. "The political relations of the South under the Federal constitution, and the foreign policy to be supported; the maintenance and extension of her institutions within the limits of the Union and beyond them, and her means of defense and security from aggression, present and prospective."⁸⁵

The convention at Montgomery adjourned to meet the following year at Vicksburg. At the appointed time, May 9, 1859, the Vicksburg convention opened. The reports of the meeting so far available do not give the number of delegates. Nine States were represented—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.⁸⁶ Says a leading Southern journal of the day: "All the more Southern slave-holding States were represented, some, it is true, very meagerly, but others largely."⁸⁷

Five days the convention was in session, and four out of these five were taken up in a discussion of the African slave trade.⁸⁸ Yet other things were done. This meeting has more right to the name "Commercial convention" than its predecessor at Montgomery.

Resolutions were passed advocating the removal of obstructions at the mouth of the Mississippi river by the national government, on the ground that this river was an "inland sea."⁸⁹ Other resolutions dealt once again with the vital importance to the South and the entire country of a Pacific railroad, and called for national and State aid in building it. While still others expressed the convention's approval of the pending establishment of permanent commercial relations between the Southern Mississippi valley and Belgium; provided for the appointment of committees to consider education; and proposed measures for the more

⁸⁵ Printed in *De Bow's Review*, May, 1858.

⁸⁶ *De Bow's Review*, June, 1859.

⁸⁷ *De Bow's Review*, June, 1859, p. 713.

⁸⁸ Proceedings of convention in *De Bow's Review*, July, 1859; also *De Bow's Review*, June, 1859, p. 713.

⁸⁹ Proceedings of convention in *De Bow's Review*, July, 1859, p. 100. Reference was here made to Calhoun's declaring the Mississippi river an "inland sea," at convention in 1845.

definite organization of the Southern commercial convention movement.⁹⁰

The two leaders in debate here pitted against each other, respectively for and against the reopening of the slave trade, were Mr. Spratt, of South Carolina, and Governor Foote, of Mississippi.

Mr. Spratt was a burning, eloquent advocate. He claimed that the border States were steadily sending forth slaves into the West and lower South, that each day free labor was encroaching on slave territory, that in time this would force the border States to become free territory, and thus, if more slave labor were not procured in some way, slave territory would not only be restricted to narrower and narrower limits in the section of its then seeming establishment, but would also be unable to spread and acquire more territory. Mr. Spratt thought it impracticable to hope to obtain Congressional enactment for the reopening of the trade. He therefore counseled nullification—of the violent, un-Calhoun type—saying that:

"If this government in the madness which precedes its dissolution, shall send its agents to enforce the law; if they shall search our homes and seize our citizens for acts we recognize as right, the tea again falls overboard, the powder is seized again in Charleston harbor, and as sure as the sun shall rise, it shall rise upon the reeking plains of a Southern Lexington and Concord."⁹¹

Governor Foote replied in a pointed, scathing speech. He said that the reopening of the slave trade meant among other things, which he discussed, three certainties: A reduction in the price of cotton, a tremendous reduction in the value of slaves, and consequently their almost exclusive acquirement by the capitalist.

As to Mr. Spratt's method of opening the trade, he declared it would be high treason against the government of the United States, and moreover, he charged Mr. Spratt with spreading treasonable sentiments in his speech. Governor Foote counseled strict adherence to the laws of the Federal government, which were, he said, the logical safeguards to the institution of slavery.⁹²

⁹⁰ Proceedings, etc.

⁹¹ Debates of convention, reported in *De Bow's Review*, August, 1859, p. 212.

⁹² Debates of convention.

As the debate proceeded, so violent became the controversy between the factions that Governor Foote and a fellow anti-slave-trader, a Mr. I. N. Partridge, resigned their seats and left the convention.⁹³

Finally the vote was taken on the resolution, which read as follows:

"That in the opinion of this convention, all laws, State or Federal, prohibiting the African slave trade ought to be repealed."⁹⁴

It resulted thus: Ayes, Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Georgia, Mississippi, and Texas; noes, Tennessee and Florida. The vote of South Carolina was equally divided.⁹⁵

Probably the most important thing done by this convention as a strictly commercial convention was the passage of resolutions tending to establish future meetings on a more permanent basis. These provided for the appointment by the State Governors of three delegates from each Congressional district and four from the State at large, and for the appointment of one delegate for each election district by the county police and probate courts and the mayors of cities. In addition they called for two committees: one a standing committee in each State to invite such citizens of other States as they saw fit, and the other to look into the expediency of having the delegates elected by the people.

But of what profit were all these measures for organization? Of what real importance were they, except as a significant incident in the growth of a movement which then stood on the brink of utter ruin and oblivion? The great drama it had sought to prevent, the tragedy its members and advocates perhaps foresaw and strove to change, swept it aside and out of being.

No one measure ran through all the conventions of this last group—1853-1859. Two, however, occupied prominent places in the proceedings of five out of the seven conventions. The convention in Montgomery in 1858 swung so much out of line that it cannot be considered in a discussion of the basic resolutions of the conventions.⁹⁶

⁹³ Proceedings of convention in De Bow's *Review*, July, 1859, p. 100.

⁹⁴ De Bow's *Review*, June, 1859, p. 713.

⁹⁵ De Bow's *Review*, June, 1859, p. 713.

⁹⁶ Proceedings and resolutions of Montgomery convention of 1859, in De Bow's *Review*, June, 1858.

The two measures in question were the building of a Pacific railroad and the opening of direct trade with Europe—internal improvement and external extension. The following table shows the time and place of their recurrence:

<i>Pacific Railroad:</i>	<i>Direct Trade:</i>
1. Memphis,1853	1. Charleston,1854
2. Charleston,1854	2. New Orleans,1855
3. New Orleans,1855	3. Savannah,1856
4. Savannah,1856	4. Knoxville,1857
5. Vicksburg,1859	5. Vicksburg,1859

In tracing the development of the plans for a Pacific railroad, we find that the conventions' actions did not move uniformly. At Vicksburg in 1859 very much the same views were advocated as at Memphis in 1853, while in 1854, 1855 and 1856 much more definite ground was taken.⁹⁷ The Memphis meeting passed exceedingly general and vague resolutions on the subject. They stated that the railroad was desired and that it was the duty of the Federal government to render some aid. The resolutions as first submitted contained a clause that the national Government should build at least one trunk line. This was stricken out.⁹⁸ The national Government should aid, but who should actually build the road or how this aid should be extended was unmentioned.

Extremes beget extremes. If Memphis was indefinite, Charleston (1854) was distinctly the opposite. The plan for a Pacific railroad as put forth by this meeting was probably the most definite and explicit measure, whether practicable or not, forthcoming from any Southern commercial conventions. Its proposer and leading advocate was Albert Pike, of Arkansas.⁹⁹

The road was to be built by the South alone. The plan called for the granting of a charter of incorporation by the Virginia legislature. The members of this corporation were to be the separate Southern States, and any cities, private corporations, or individuals who wished to subscribe for stock. Each State was to take not less than two million dollars worth of stock, and each was to be equally represented on the board of directors.

⁹⁷ Proceedings of each year in De Bow's *Review*.

⁹⁸ Proceedings of Memphis convention of 1853 in DeBow's *Review*, September, 1853, pp. 267 and 271.

⁹⁹ *Journal of Proceedings*, 1854, pp. 64-70, and p. 16 of appendix.

The matter was to be laid before the Creek, Cherokee and Choctaw nations, and they were to be given the opportunity of becoming sharers in the enterprise. Also the State of California was to be invited to join. The proposed terminus of the road lay on the Gulf of California. It would therefore be necessary for the road to extend through Mexican territory, which matter was to be arranged with the Mexican government by the Southern States acting as a corporation. Their power to negotiate with a foreign nation was to be granted in the charter. Each State at the South was to recognize the existence of this corporation and grant it such powers "as may be necessary to effect the objects of the organization."¹⁰⁰ Special sessions of the different State legislatures were to be called and committees were appointed to take immediate action in pushing forward the matter.

This plan was unanimously adopted by the convention. As Colonel Pike unfolded its different parts in an eloquent and stirring speech, the convention literally went wild. Again and again he met with cheers and "rapturous applause." The galleries were crowded with ladies.

The North was not as sanguine. Quoting the *New York Times*:

"His (Pike's) plan for raising money is impracticable, and as regards amount, \$28,000,000 insufficient. He would find more capital in New York City and Philadelphia than among the Indians and Mexicans."¹⁰¹

Another novel plan for the building of a Pacific road was that laid before this convention by Lieut. M. F. Maury, the distinguished geographer, who, Humboldt said, originated a new science. Lieut. Maury claimed that as a measure of national defense the Federal government should construct a double track line to the Pacific. This line was to serve the same purpose as a river or other public waterway. The rolling stock was to be operated by private individuals. It was to be a public thoroughfare, kept up by the government, who should also regulate the movement of trains.¹⁰² This measure was not put as a resolution and of course was not acted on.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, appendix, p. 16.

¹⁰¹ *New York Times*, April 25, 1854.

¹⁰² *Journal of Proceedings*, pp. 79-83.

The Charleston convention in discussion, but not in resolutions, repudiated any aid by the national government in the building of a Pacific railroad.¹⁰³

The New Orleans convention called for national aid and adopted all measures of the Charleston meeting.¹⁰⁴

The convention at Savannah in 1856 adopted the resolutions of the New Orleans convention with nothing new added.¹⁰⁵

The Vicksburg resolutions of 1859, as has been said, reverted toward the views of the Memphis convention of 1853. They were more definite, however, calling for the appointment of a committee to memorialize the State legislatures and Congress for aid in the undertaking.¹⁰⁶ Yet in this matter of a Pacific road we find the end not far removed from the beginning, in either accomplishment or views as to how things could be accomplished.

The question of Southern direct trade, though acted on by a majority of conventions of the last group, took up little of their time in discussion. The matter seemed an acknowledged need of the South. The progress in this line of endeavor was in the end more satisfactory than that made in the building of a Pacific railroad.

The Charleston convention of 1854 proposed that the Southern States encourage direct trade by remitting all tax or paying a drawback to the importer. It also appointed committees to inquire into the need of establishing steamship lines from Southern ports, and to memorialize Congress upon the carriage of foreign mails.¹⁰⁷

The resolutions of the New Orleans convention of 1855 advocated in general terms the establishment of steamship lines from Southern to European ports and claimed that the national government should grant to them their just share of the foreign mails.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Col. Pike, the foremost advocate of the Pacific Railroad, repudiated it and his speeches to the convention on this subject called forth wild applause. His plan was unanimously adopted by the convention.

¹⁰⁴ Proceedings of convention in De Bow's *Review*, April, 1855, p. 520.

¹⁰⁵ Proceedings of convention in De Bow's *Review*, January, 1857, p. 99.

¹⁰⁶ Proceedings of convention in De Bow's *Review*, July, 1859.

¹⁰⁷ *Journal of Proceedings*, appendix, pp. 18, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Proceedings of convention in De Bow's *Review*, March, 1855, p. 360.

At Savannah the following year was broached the once famous "A. Dudley Mann Scheme."¹⁰⁰ It is a fit companion to Colonel Pike's Pacific railroad scheme. They stand as picturesque examples of the aggressive, visionary, but withal big commercial thought of certain Southern men at that time. The eagerness with which the people seized on both showed that this spirit of awakening, of a desire to try new and great things, was abroad.

Mr. Mann proposed to incorporate a company with a capital stock of \$50,000,000 for the purpose of establishing a "steam ferry" between the Chesapeake—the exact port not specified—and Milford Haven, England, a small but good harbor near Liverpool. The "ferries" were to be iron steamships of 20,000 tons burden each, which should make weekly trips between Europe and America. Mr. Mann thus spoke of the proposed fleet:

"Four such vessels in point of size as the *Leviathan*, leaving each side of the Atlantic weekly would convey two millions of tons of cargo per annum. Three hundred sailing vessels of a thousand tons each would not have the capacity to perform such a service. Moreover, those vessels would require that which the South is not in a condition to supply,—ten thousand sailors; while sixteen hundred hands including the necessary number of experienced seamen, would be ample for four *Leviathans*. The economy in building, running, equipping, and all else, of the latter over the former would be fully fifty per cent. A cargo of twenty-five thousand bales of cotton could be received aboard or discharged in three days. The gross receipts for the voyage, or a passage out and a passage in, may be safely estimated on an average at \$200,000, or \$10,400,000 per annum. The steamships, constructed entirely of iron, would probably be seaworthy for one hundred years, and then in value be worth half their original cost. As it is tolerably certain that they could be made reliably sea proof and fire proof, insurance would be measureably dispensed with; and including wear and tear, they could be prob-

¹⁰⁰ Resolutions of convention in De Bow's *Review*, January, 1856, p. 96; also for a general discussion of the question, see the following articles.

"The Steam Ferry Line to Europe from the Chesapeake," by A. Dudley Mann, in De Bow's *Review*, April, 1857;

"Letters from Lieut. Maury and Joseph Segon on a Line of Steamers from the Chesapeake to Europe," in De Bow's *Review*, May, 1857;

"Southern Steamship Line," by a Dudley Mann, in De Bow's *Review*, September, 1857;

"Southern Enterprise: Line of Steamships from Norfolk to Europe," by B. T. Archer, in De Bow's *Review*, February, 1853.

Also De Bow's *Review*, September, 1857, pp. 321-324.

ably run at a cost not exceeding \$7,000,000 per annum, when fairly established."¹¹⁰

These would be enormous ships, even for the present time. His idea was indeed a bold and fascinating one. On both sides the Atlantic the plan was discussed. Said the *London Times* in speaking of the *Leviathan*, one of the proposed fleet:

"Even Noah's ark must yield precedence to her, and to her all the *Marlboroughs* and *Wellingtons* and *Merrimacs* and *Niagaras* are mere cockboats."¹¹¹

Mr. Mann's plan was broad as it was bold and fascinating. He preached concentration of railroads on the Chesapeake, especially the roads in the South and Middle West.¹¹² He clearly meant to turn the export trade of the Ohio and upper Mississippi valley into other channels and thereby cut off one of the great elements of New York's strength. He meant equally to deflect the trade of the South thitherward. In brief he meant to move the emporium of American trade from New York Bay to the Chesapeake—Norfolk, in all probability.¹¹³ The railroads were in sympathy with the movement, for in June, 1857, at the call of the Virginia and Tennessee railroad company, a convention of all the companies of Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee was held at Bristol, Tenn., to select a commission of three, who should proceed to England and lay before the Chambers of Commerce in Liverpool, Manchester, and London, the importance of the steamship line and railroad connection incident to a direct trade with the South.¹¹⁴

The enemies of the measure, notably of course the Northern press, claimed that if such a line were established there would be insufficient traffic to make it a success, and even if there were sufficient traffic, the financial resources of any city on the Chesapeake would be inadequate to handle the trade.

¹¹⁰ "Atlantic Steam Ferry Company," by A. Dudley Mann, containing charter of incorporation, in *De Bow's Review*, May, 1858, p. 352.

¹¹¹ Extract from the *London Times*, in *De Bow's Review*, May, 1858, p. 371.

¹¹² Proceedings of steamship convention at Old Point Comfort, Va., 1857, in *De Bow's Review*, September, 1857, p. 32.

¹¹³ "Atlantic Steam Ferry Company," by A. Dudley Mann, in *De Bow's Review*, May, 1858, p. 352.

¹¹⁴ *De Bow's Review*, July, 1857, p. 86.

A writer in the Norfolk *American* said regarding the former danger:

"The valley of the Ohio has four times the produce necessary to load a weekly line of mammoth steamers; the Virginia water line can transport three times as much as this weekly line would require; and the average saving of freight over this line would be nearly one-third of the cost of rival routes."

Certainly the Baltimore and Ohio railroad had grown with wonderful rapidity. In 1856 it transported 955,000 barrels of flour alone to tide-water of the Chesapeake.¹¹⁵ As to the financial side of the question, it was true that there was a woeful lack of funds, but great commerce builds banking houses, and it was an open question whether a first lack of funds would have prevented trade.

Mr. Mann obtained a charter from the legislature of Virginia incorporating the company.¹¹⁶ Ten days later, March, 1858, books were opened and stock was being sold. The shares sold for one hundred dollars each. It was a provision of the charter that for six months after sales opened no one could subscribe for more than one share. The object was to enable every person in the South to become a shareholder. It was meant for and was a popular demonstration for Southern Commercial independence.¹¹⁷ The line was to open in 1862.

The convention at Knoxville in 1857, as far as the expression of sentiment was concerned, passed important resolutions on the establishment of steamship lines from Southern ports. They stated that steamship lines were as worthy of public aid as railroads and called upon Southern business men to extend every aid possible. Committees were appointed to memorialize the State legislatures on the subject and to prepare an address to the people.¹¹⁸

The resolutions of the Vicksburg convention of 1859 expressed only approbation and give notice that something definite had been accomplished in the establishment of Southern trade rela-

¹¹⁵ De Bow's *Review*, April, 1857, p. 440.

¹¹⁶ The charter is printed in De Bow's *Review*, May, 1858, p. 375.

¹¹⁷ "Atlantic Steam Ferry Company," by A. Dudley Mann, in De Bow's *Review*, May, 1858, p. 353.

¹¹⁸ *Official Proceedings*, etc.

tions with Europe. It seems that negotiations had been carried on between the cities of the Mississippi valley and the Belgian government. A special ship, the possible forerunner of an established line, was soon to arrive. The cities—New Orleans, Vicksburg, Memphis, and St. Louis—were urgently advised to make the visit a success.¹¹⁹

And here we reach the end of the movement for direct trade. Had there been progress since 1853? There can be little doubt that there had been. In 1853 the condition of Southern steamships and direct trade was about the same as in 1843 or 1833. In 1859, trade relations had been practically established with a foreign country and stock for a \$50,000,000 line was on sale, while a second from New Orleans to France, was in progress of organization and had already made application to Congress for the carriage of mails.¹²⁰ Of course the conventions did not necessarily bring all this about, but no doubt exerted a strong influence.

A third far-reaching scheme was the proposal to open the Amazon valley to Southern trade.¹²¹ The opening of the Amazon valley had been for several years a question of public discussion and of diplomatic negotiation on the part of the Federal government. Its broachment at the Richmond and Memphis conventions of 1852 and 1853, respectively, was a new idea only as regards the great importance of this region's commercial acquisition by the South. A matter of national concern was thus made a question of deep sectional interest.

A clear understanding of the situation will require a brief review of a few incidents of history.¹²² In 1850 a war was raging between Brazil and Paraguay over the refusal of the latter to allow the former free navigation of the Paraguay river, which took its source in Brazil. It was proposed in Washington that the United States Government mediate in the war and obtain

¹¹⁹ Proceedings of convention in De Bow's *Review*, July, 1859.

¹²⁰ "Ocean Steamers from New Orleans to France," in De Bow's *Review*, March, 1857.

¹²¹ Proceedings of convention of 1852 in De Bow's *Review*, April, 1853, p. 374; Also Proceedings of convention of 1853 in De Bow's *Review*, September, 1853.

¹²² A Clear review of the situation is presented in an unsigned article of De Bow's *Review*, February, 1853.

for Brazil the right of free navigation. Using this as a precedent, it would then negotiate with Brazil for the free navigation of the Amazon after having secured from Bolivia and Peru, within whose borders lay the western portion of the Amazon valley, ports of free entry.

Brazil in some way heard of the pending plan of procedure, of the commercial designs of "this nation of pirates,"¹²³ and forthwith redoubled her efforts, brought the Paraguayan war to an early and successful end, and at once sent special envoys to her western neighbors, Bolivia and Peru. Her object was to secure the exclusive right of foreign navigation in their Amazonian streams, granting in return the privilege of navigating the Amazon in Brazilian territory. The envoy to Peru met with success, but the one to Bolivia was refused point-blank. Three months before the signing of this treaty between Peru and Brazil, the American minister at Lima, Mr. Clay, had brought to a close a formal treaty between Peru and the United States granting among other things that "the citizens of either republic may frequent with their vessels all the coasts, ports, and places of the other, wherever foreign commerce is permitted."¹²⁴ And furthermore, in this treaty, Peru bound herself not to grant any "favours, privileges, or immunity whatever, in matters of commerce and navigation to other nations which shall not be also immediately extended to the citizens of the United States." Bolivia granted the United States freedom of navigation in her part of the Amazon valley. On these upper water courses both Peru and Bolivia had established ports of entry. Therefore, the question was restricted to this: do, in the case of a river system, free ports of entry throw open the entire system to navigation up to those ports? Brazil with glaring inconsistency refused to acknowledge the right.

The Memphis convention declared: "that the free navigation of the Amazon was worthy of the best efforts of American statesmen;"¹²⁵ that our sister republic of the South—Bolivia—had a right to the free navigation of the Amazon; that the Amazon

¹²³ "Observator," Brazil, Oct. 23, 1852, quoted in De Bow's *Review*, September, 1853, p. 263.

¹²⁴ De Bow's *Review*, February, 1853.

¹²⁵ Resolutions in De Bow's *Review*, September, 1853, p. 263.

valley should be replenished and subdued; and that Lieut. M. F. Maury be appointed to call the attention of the government to the importance of procuring the free navigation of that river and of opening commercial relations by steam. Bishop James H. Otey and Dr. C. T. Quintard, of Tennessee, were the leading advocates of the open valley policy at this, the Memphis convention.¹²⁶

At Memphis the measure in question met with no opposition, at Charleston, with considerable. It was declared a matter entirely foreign to the interests of the convention—a political matter, which encouraged meddling with another nation's affairs and filibustering. The resolutions finally passed at Charleston recommended to the Federal government the sending of two small steamers to explore the river and the encouragement of the establishment of lines of steamers between Southern ports and the mouth of the Amazon.¹²⁷

In the speeches of the advocates of this seemingly incongruous subject for a commercial convention—Bishop Otey and Dr. Quintard at Memphis and Lieutenants Herndon¹²⁸ and Maury at Charleston—we catch the real significance of the agitation of the question. Commercial expansion was necessary for the South and the less exploited the field, the greater would be the South's chance of controlling the commercial destiny of that field. Such a region as desired, unexploited by others, but containing an abundance of natural wealth, was the Amazon valley, with its 2,000,000 square miles of tropical forests, teeming with the wealth of the vegetable kingdom; with its western and south-eastern mountain barriers yielding precious metals in immense quantities; with its diamond fields and prairies, grass covered table-lands and deep water-ways, and above all, with its soil, giving forth a thousand fold in a year and under its burning tropic sun calling aloud for African slave labor. The basic social institution of the South would here be given an opportunity to spread southward, and in time, as the American reduced to plantations the wilds of the Amazon, Brazil would in a sense become only

¹²⁶ See proceedings of convention.

¹²⁷ *Journal of Proceedings* at Charleston convention, in which see speech of James Lyon, p. 116.

¹²⁸ Lieutenant Herndon had lately returned from exploration on the Amazon.

an extended South whither could be sent our surplus African population, and there would be found another great agricultural section whose social foundation stone was similar to the South. Thus argued the advocates of the measure. They were visionary, perhaps, but their view was a broad one. As a part of the theoretical commercial policy of the South it was important because two great conventions of Southern men of affairs endorsed it.¹²⁰

Resolutions on the establishing of manufactories in the South, passed by the conventions of 1854, 1856 (Memphis), 1857, and 1859, were general in tone, endorsing the idea, calling on the South for co-operation, and appointing committees to report statistical information at the following meeting—none of which was done. The conventions attempted to put forth no definite scheme for the direct or indirect establishment of manufactories.

The betterment of the South's educational system¹²⁰ was a subject of resolutions for every convention of the last group, except Baltimore, 1852, and Montgomery, which is not included in this discussion. Besides advocacy of Southern education in general, these resolutions sought to bring about two things: first, a uniform system of school books written by Southern men; second, the establishment of a Southern printing house.¹²¹ The convention at Knoxville proposed a plan for creating a company composed of the different Southern States in order to bring this latter thing about. The Charleston convention of 1854 recommended a system of commercial education and Vicksburg, 1859, schools for the training of seamen, which schools should be supported by the State. These were the only instances of proposals for education with a distinctly commercial aim.

A discussion of the tariff filled little time of the conventions, and resolutions for it, or as would be expected, broadly against it, are not found in the proceedings. At Charleston in 1854 and at Richmond in 1856 resolutions were passed calling for a reduction by the national government of the duty on railroad iron. In this respect, the conventions of the last group, 1853-1859, were markedly different from those of earlier years—of 1837-1839

¹²⁰ Convention of 1853, Memphis, and 1854, Charleston.

¹²⁰ For a general discussion of the subject, see "Southern Education for Southern Youth," by Jno. L. Perkins in *De Bow's Review*, October, 1855.

¹²¹ See resolutions of conventions.

especially. On this subject of a tariff and kindred subjects the convention at Savannah in 1856 received a letter from Robert Toombs, of Georgia, in which he gave his views, emphatically laid down, of what he considered necessary for the revival of Southern commerce.¹⁸² He said that this could only be brought about by making it cheaper to import directly into the South than through the North. The only way for the slave-holding States to make this so was by taxing imports through the North and remitting all tax on imports direct to Southern ports, to such an extent that the preference in trade would be forced in favor of the Southern importer.

Says the *New York Times* in criticism of this letter:

"Senator Toombs' letter to the convention shows him clear-headed enough to see that nothing can be done by mere resolutions. The scheme cannot work, for it is simply proposing that the Southern people voluntarily tax themselves to buy goods from abroad, which is not the cheapest market."¹⁸³

In a review of the multifarious measures of these fourteen conventions, from 1837 to 1859, one is very apt to feel confused, long before the end is reached. The theoretical end, it is true, was commercial regeneration, but the ways for bringing it about vary with each meeting, advancing from the vaguely general to the particular, retreating from the particular to the vaguely general, and then sinking out of sight to be brought up in a new phase years later or remaining to the end in the dust box of oblivion.

Yet although the specific resolutions varied, the proceedings and apparent aim of each convention, and therefore the entire lot, fall under two heads: improvement of commercial conditions at home and the extension of commercial relations abroad. The conventions of 1845 and 1849 seem exceptions to this rule. They were exclusively for internal improvement. But the avowed aim at Memphis in 1845 was: to bind the South together, the Atlantic coast with the Mississippi valley, to clear the Mississippi for navigation, and then to bind the West to the South. The convention of 1849 proves the only exception. The connecting

¹⁸² Letter from Robt. Toombs to Messrs. Edward C. Anderson, Mayor, and others of Savannah, Ga., in *De Bow's Review*, January, 1857, p. 102.

¹⁸³ *New York Times*, Dec. 17, 1856.

of the Atlantic coast with the Pacific was its single aim. Consequently its resolutions fall under only one of the heads,—to extend commercial relations abroad.

From the beginning to the end the extension of relations abroad was to be accomplished by Southern steamship lines, by the reduction of taxes and, in some cases, duty on certain imported articles, and by the establishment of financial relations abroad by Southern banking houses. Under this general head comes the plan of opening the Amazon, A. Dudley Mann's \$50,000,000 steamship proposition, and the Pacific railroad. May be the movers were dreamers, but no one will deny that they were grand dreamers. What meant their schemes? One aimed at the commercial acquisition by the South of the greatest river valley in the world; another at Southern control of European commerce with America; another hoped to turn the balance of Asiatic trade into the South and through the South to the rest of America and to Western Europe. These were not half-way measures. They aimed at conquest, absolute mastery.

The improvement of conditions at home meant internal improvement in its broadest sense. Railroads should be built, canals dug, rivers cleared, education fostered, manufactories established, statistical information spread, and Southern financial institutions brought in closer touch and made parts of a Southern system. The last measure is only met with in the earlier conventions—1837-1839. It called forth their foremost resolutions.

The Vicksburg convention of 1859¹⁸⁴ adjourned to meet in Atlanta, Georgia, in the following year, but the approach of the Civil War put an end to these meetings for the furthering of the economic South. A study of their rise and progress leads at last to a chasm, into whose depths plunged the economic South of old. The different schemes are lost sight of while in mid-air. Thus it was with the trade with South America, with A. Dudley Mann's scheme, with the great inter-state printing house, with the extensive plants for internal improvement, with the forming of trade relations abroad. Even before the end the original spirit of the conventions had vanished. The political heat of the hour had destroyed it.

¹⁸⁴ Proceedings of Vicksburg convention, July, 1859.

